Pakistan, China to boost anti-terror cooperation

By Bakhtawar Mian

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Chinese Ambassador Jian Zedong on Monday discussed security ties and other matters of mutual interest.

The two sides agreed to further strengthen cooperation in counter-terrorism and security issues.

During the meeting, the Chinese ambassador condemned the suicide attack near the Islamabad district courts and expressed his condolences over the tragic loss of human lives. He said that China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson also condemned this unfortunate incident.

Mr Naqvi said that Pakistan-China relations were based on mutual trust and respect, adding that China is a trusted friend of Pakistan, which has stood by the country in every difficult moment.

The Chinese ambassador said that China will continue to extend full cooperation to Pakistan.

Policeman injured in grenade attack in Jaffarabad

By Ali Jan Mangi

DERA MURAD JAMALI: A policeman was seriously injured in a grenade attack on a security post in Jaffarabad, police said.

They said unidentified attackers hurled a hand grenade at the post on the National Highway, seriously injuring the official and causing damage to the post.

The injured officer was taken to Dera Allah Yar hospital. Police cordoned off the area after the attack and launched a search operation to arrest attackers.

Meanwhile, an explosive device planted outside the house of a social activist, Rasheed Nousani Darmazai Bugti, went off and badly damaged his house.

However, Mr Bugti and his family members remained safe in the blast.

JUI-N to boycott LG polls in Quetta

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: The Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Nazaryati (JUI-N) has announced it will boycott the upcoming local government elections in the provincial capital.

The ECP has announced holding of local government elections on Dec 28 in the provincial capital on the orders of the Balochistan High Court, which dismissed all petitions seeking delay of LG polls.

JUI-N Convener Qari Mehrullah told a presser that people of Quetta are already deprived of basic facilities and multiple FC checkpoints in the city have also restricted people's free movement across the city. Holding LG elections in these conditions amid harsh weather, even on the court's orders, is not appropriate, he said.

The JUI-N leader said his party decided to boycott the LG polls and urged the government and ECP to postpone the polls.

Justice Mullahkhail becomes acting CJ

QUETTA: Balochistan Governor Jaffar Khan Mandokhail on Monday administered the oath of office to Justice Mohammad Kamran Khan Mullahkhail as the acting Chief Justice of the Balochistan High Court.

Justice Mullahkhail was appointed acting CJ after the appointment of Chief Justice Roozi Khan Breach as judge of Federal Constitutional Court.
—Staff Correspondent

LOCAL people gather near the site of a bridge after it collapsed in Bazaar Kot area of Shangla on Monday. — Photo by Umar Bacha

KP to save Rs7bn through new funding model of free treatment scheme

The model, approved by cabinet, will stand enforced from July 1, 2025

By Ashfaq Yusufzai

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to adopt fund management model for free treatment of people under Sehat Card Plus scheme to save money, according to officials.

Currently, the programme operates under insurance model under which the government pays Rs4,000 premium per family to State Life Insurance Corporation (SLIC), the implementer of the scheme on annual basis. In line with fund management model, the government will pay actual cost of patients' treatment in addition to5.6 per cent (Rs1.8 billion) as administrative cost to the firm.

Officials said that the model approved by the cabinet in its last meeting held on November 14 would stand implemented from July 1, 2025 as currently the programme was being run by SLIC under one-year temporary arrangement as the last five-year agreement expired on June 30, 2025.

They said that under the new model of fund management, the government would b also to save Rs7 to Rs8 billion annually.

Minutes of cabinet's meeting are still awaited but officials told this scribe that there would be two types of payment to SLIC at the end of every month. One is the actual cost of patients' treatment, which will be around Rs35 billion and another payment will be administrative expenses in lieu of the services including contract with empanelled hospitals, gate-keeping, monitoring and claim management.

"The agreement, yet to be signed with SLIC, will brand down the yearly cost of SCP from an estimated Rs45 billion to Rs37 billion," officials said.

They said that at the end of year, SLIC would return the unspent amount. SCP, started in 2016 from four districts with coverage of poor people, has been extended to the entire population of the province (10.6 million families) in a phase-wised manner.

Officials in health department said that a permanent and sustainable implementation model was required for the future of the programme. The policy board of SCP after extensive deliberations on the matter had agreed upon two implementable options for which a summary was submitted to cabinet with two options, they said. One of the options was fund management model and the other was insurance model, they added.

According to the summary, fund management model was more acceptable and adaptable in terms of finances while insurance model was more expensive and less adaptable due to which the cabinet accorded approval to the former as the future design for the programme.

In fund management model, the government allocates funds periodically to a fund manager, who reimburses hospitals for services provided under the agreed package. "This model offers greater financial flexibility and high coverage with minimal out-of-pocket expenses but poses challenges in gate-keeping," said officials.

In insurance model, the government pays a fixed annual premium per family to an insurance company. It provides predictable costs, and better gate-keeping but it is relatively more expensive and less flexible during the contract period.

For managing funds, the fund manager charges administrative expenses.

Officials said that SLIC would act as fund manger under the new model but it would save money to government. The insurance firm has been implementing the programme since its onset in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is getting administrative expenses but after enforcement of the new model, it will get only actual cost of patients' treatment along with administrative expenses.

The programme has benefitted about five million patients at a cost of Rs125 billion so far. Currently, there are 166 empanelled hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the total number of empanelled hospitals throughout the country is 700.

Kukikhel rivals end their differences

By Our Correspondent

KHYBER: Two rival groups of Kukikhel elders in Jamrud announced on Monday to end their differences and work jointly for resolution of local issues.

The announcement was made at a jirga held in Jamrud. The elders of all sub-tribes of Kukikhel attended.

Announcing the decision, Kukikhel elders pledged to wage a joint struggle for ownership of Regi Lalma housing scheme land, provision of gas to Jamrud, end to excessive power loadshedding and return of remaining internally displaced families to Rajgal along with other thorny issues.

The jirga decided to hold next joint meeting on Monday. It appealed to Chief Minister Sohail Afridi to take interest in resolving of long-standing issues confronted by Kukikhel tribe.

Differences between the two groups of Kukikhel elders surfaced some years ago over demarcation of boundaries of undivided lands, involvement of some elders in political activities and the money the tribe had spent on some of their collective gatherings, especially nearly six weeks of a protest for the return of displaced families to Rajgal.

Sources said that one group of elders was opposed to politicising of local issues by Malak Naseer Ahmad, who had clearly aligned himself with the proscribed Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) and had even announced providing land for its head office in Jamrud.

They said that some issues were still to be resolved but the two groups at least agreed to put up a joint struggle for winning their share in Regi Lalma housing scheme along with safe and early return of all the remaining IDPs.

Curfew imposed in Tirah, North Waziristan

PESHAWAR: The authorities on Monday imposed a curfew in the Khyber district's Tirah Valley, including Maidan, Dotai, and adjoining areas. The curfew will remain effective from 6am until evening.

District authorities have instructed residents to avoid unnecessary travel and movement, stating that the decision was taken due to the prevailing security situation in the region.

Officials added that preventing illegal drug-related activities is also a key objective of the curfew.

Meanwhile, in North Waziristan, a two-day curfew was imposed, restricting all public movement. All major and minor roads will remain closed during this period. Only security forces and authorised personnel will be allowed to move within the restricted zones.

The administration has warned that any violation of the curfew will result in strict disciplinary action.

Essential services and emergency teams will remain available to assist citizens when needed. —APP

Four killed in Dera

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: Four people were killed in separate incidents in parts of Dera Ismail Khan on Monday, the police said.

An official said a man was killed and another injured when unknown attackers opened fire on them in the cantonment police station limits. The deceased was identified as Mohammad Ayub and the injured as Wazir Khan.

The deceased's brother, Abdul Majeed Marwat, filed an FIR, stating that the family had an old feud, though no suspects were immediately nominated.

In another incident, a married woman was shot dead by her brother over a dispute, also in the cantonment police jurisdiction. Relatives told police that she had returned to her parents' home due to marital issues before the fatal shooting.

Separately, a 13-year-old boy, Mohammad Hassan, died after falling from a tree at his home in Kokar village. According to his brother, he was critically injured in the fall and died during treatment.

Police said that a young man was killed when armed men attacked his vehicle in the limits of Aba Shaheed police station. The victim was identified as Mohammad Jamshed, 24. The motive behind the killing was stated to be an old enmity.—Correspondent

Six more dengue cases

PESHAWAR: Dengue continued to spread across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as six new confirmed cases were reported during the last 24 hours.

According to the provincial health department on Monday, the number of active dengue patients has now reached 309.

This year, the total number of dengue cases in the province has risen to 5,895.

During the past 24 hours, two new patients were admitted to hospitals. Currently, 14 patients are under treatment in hospitals across the province.

Over the year, a total of 2,038 patients have been hospitalised, while 5,583 patients have recovered from the virus. Three deaths have been reported due to dengue so far this year.—APP

CM distributes Rs64m scholarship cheques to varsity students

Says market-relevant academic subjects being introduced to enable students to compete locally, internationally

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi on Monday distributed scholarship cheques worth Rs64 million to 347 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in various universities.

During the scholarship distribution ceremony organised by the KP Education Foundation at the Chief Minister's House here, Mr Afridi also announced an additional allocation of Rs300 million for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Foundation, according to an official statement.

Of the amount, Rs200 million will be designated for settled districts and the rest for merged tribal districts.

The chief minister said that the provincial government was committed to providing equitable and enhanced educational opportunities to students from middle-income and underprivileged families.

He said no talented student should be forced to discontinue their education due to financial constraints.

"The students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are capable and hardworking. They only need opportunities and adequate facilities. Our youth are the future of Pakistan. Tomorrow, they will lead the province and the nation," he said.

Mr Afridi announced that the provincial government was introducing market-relevant academic subjects to ensure that students are equipped to compete at national and international levels.

"Our goal is to prepare graduates who would not only secure employment immediately after completing their education but would also become job providers," he said.

The chief minister also revealed that an internship programme was being launched to prevent skilled young people from remaining unemployed.

He said that all government policies were aimed at public welfare."We will ensure good governance and demonstrate meaningful results," he said.

KP Education Foundation Managing Director Zariful Maani informed participants that a total of 347 scholarships were being awarded this year under the Chief Minister's Education Endowment Fund and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Foundation.

He said the second major initiative of the foundation was the introduction of a fully digitized scholarship regime to ensure transparency."Now, a proper mechanism has been devised for the award of scholarships and human involvement has been almost excluded from the process," he said.

Mr Maani said that just a few days ago, new scholarships were advertised and some 14,000 students had applied for it with the deadline still days away.

He said the registration would hopefully reach 30,000 by the deadline.

"The slots we have for the scholarships are just 227. I will request the chief minister, who is also chairman of the foundation's board of governors, to enhance the slots to at least 500," he said.

He said the foundation had introduced a fully automated, transparent digital scholarship system which ensures merit, transparency and gender parity.

The MD said the programme had been extended to 49 universities across the country.

He said the digital portal for the scholarship programme provided a digital quantification system eliminating human intervention, while ISO certification for the scholarships portal would be acquired soon.

According to KPEF documents, during 2024-25, some 13,165 students made registrations on the KPEF scholarships portal, of which 3,669 applications were received and 227 students were awarded the scholarship purely on the basis of merit and need. Due to limited funds, only six percent of the total applicants were given the scholarship.

During 2024-25, KPEF applicants of emerging sciences, including artificial intelligence, cyber security, data sciences, allied health sciences, fin-tech and software engineering, secured the maximum number of scholarships i.e. 37 per cent of the total awards. Students of General Science got 16.7 per cent, Political Science, English and Economics 16 per cent, Biological Sciences 15.2 per cent, Engineering and Agricultural Sciences three percent each, and other fields of BS and MS degree programs got 16 per cent.

In KPEF scholarships, priority is given to orphans, minorities, transgender students and persons with disabilities, while BISP-registered students receive special consideration and Hafiz-i-Quran applicants are given additional weightage.

Mr Maani said the KPEF had introduced dashboard-based university coordination and auto-ranking to ensure fair, unbiased evaluation of candidates.

He said the institutional interviews were fully integrated into the digital system, with a track-and-trace system to ensure quick verification and payment monitoring, while scholarship renewal was subject to academic progress and attendance.

"For swift and transparent disbursement of funds, a scholarship card for direct student payments will be introduced soon so that the students could receive payments without delay," he said.

The MD said that the major achievement of the foundation was the establishment of its own building on its plot which had been lying unutilised for the past 22 years.

He said the foundation had been functioning in a rented building and they were compelled to pay Rs0.5 million rent and around Rs0.2 million as utility bills each month.

"Our foundation's own building was set up within the shortest possible span of just two months after the approval of the board of governors in an extremely low-cost prefabricated structure with a fully solarised electricity system. We have already shifted the foundation to the new building and got rid of the heavy rent and utility bills," he said.